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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

TUESDAY, MARCH 11, 2008

In Today's Papers

Discord Continues Between Turkish Military and Opposition Parties
All papers report the Chief of the Turkish General Staff (TGS) Yasar Buyukanit spoke with reporters yesterday concerning charges that pressure from the US caused Turkey to withdraw from northern Iraq. Buyukanit accused political opposition parties of launching criticisms that overshadow the military success against the PKK terrorists. Buyukanit called such criticism from the opposition "insulting," and emphasized he would never "remain silent in the face of insults that target the military."

In response to these remarks, CHP deputy chairman Mustafa Ozyurek said the opposition remains convinced that the operation ended due to US pressure. Ozyurek warned the military against intervention in political debates between the ruling party and opposition parties. Ozyurek said the CHP holds the AKP government responsible for bowing to US pressure. "To this end, the prime minister himself made a series of serious accusations aimed at the opposition. We hoped the head of the Turkish military would abstain from debates between our party and the ruling party," Ozyurek emphasized.

Later in the day, Buyukanit tried to ease strains by telling reporters he was not a "neighborhood bully." He added that his remarks were not directed against the CHP or its leader Deniz Baykal, and that he was reluctantly dragged into "a polemic."

Editorial Commentary on the Military's Polemic with Political Parties

"When Will Democracy Be the Common Platform?"

Hasan Cemal wrote in mainstream Milliyet (3/11): "The military's 'e-warning to the opposition' has become a never-ending story. The Chief of Staff General Buyukanit seems to have no intention of backing off. General Buyukanit looks like he has engaged himself in psychological warfare with opposition leaders. It appears he wants to weaken the opposition by accusing them of being enemies of army. The Turkish military used to manipulate political authorities toward

the 'right direction.' Now the military has begun manipulating opposition parties. It is time to emphasize a very basic fact about democracies. In democracies, the military has absolutely no role in politics. The military is entitled to report to the political authority and cannot act like a political party. This is the time to embrace democracy; both the ruling party and the opposition need to move toward a path where democracy is the common platform."

"Enough of This Polemic"

Gungor Mengi commented in mainstream Vatan (3/11): "The military's reaction to the opposition parties is very hard to understand. Moreover, Chief of Staff General Buyukanit is continually egging on the opposition. Yesterday he even admitted that he drafted the statement posted in TGS website which referred to the opposition leaders as 'worse than traitors.' General Buyukanit should stop making such harsh statements against the opposition. This polemic must come to end because it simply serves against the interests of national unity. The CHP, the main opposition party, has calmly asked the military to stay out of this debate because the CHP wants answers from the AKP government, not from the military. The ruling party is obviously pleased with the ongoing military vs. opposition polemic, but the military should absolutely stay away from domestic political debates."

Buyukanit Warns against the Taliban Threat in Pakistan
Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Taraf, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others report the Chief of the Turkish General Staff (TGS) Yasar Buyukanit delivered the opening remarks during an international terrorism symposium. The event was organized by TGS and held at the Centre of Excellence -- Defense against Terrorism (COE-DAT) in Ankara on March 10-11. During his address, Buyukanit stressed that

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terror organizations were illegally trying to acquire nuclear power and weapons of mass destruction. Buyukanit underlined the importance of international cooperation in the fight against terror.

In the case of Pakistan, Buyukanit warned, political turmoil and fundamentalist violence could help the Taliban seize control of the country and its nuclear weapons. "I hope Pakistan becomes stable soon," Buyukanit told the conference. He added, "if President Musharraf loses his grip, Pakistan could fall into the hands of a resurgent Taliban."

In addition, papers report Buyukanit called for a UN mechanism to be activated against countries "showing tolerance" for the PKK terrorist network.

Parliament Speaker Toptan Opens Door to DTP
Sabah, Zaman, Hurriyet, Vatan, Cumhuriyet and others: Yesterday, Speaker of Parliament Koksal Toptan received a delegation led by pro-Kurdish DTP Chairman Ahmet Turk. Mainstream Sabah says Ahmet Turk expressed his party's views concerning the Kurdish issue to Toptan. However, the meeting was closed to the press. Islamist-oriented Zaman reports that Ahmet Turk told press after the meeting, "I expressed my opinion regarding the process of lifting the parliamentary immunity for DTP deputies. Mainstream Hurriyet reports President Gul will receive the same DTP delegation today at 4:00 p.m. Meanwhile, Sabah reports the Igdirdir prosecutor initiated an investigation against Igdirdir deputy Pervin Buldan for supporting the PKK terrorist organization and its leader, Abdullah Ocalan.

Workers to Go on a Two-Hour Strike on Friday
Radikal, Hurriyet, Milliyet, Zaman, Cumhuriyet and others: Turkey's major labor unions, including Turk-Is, Disk and Kesk (which form the Emek Platform) will go on strike between 10.00-12.00 on Friday. The strike was organized in order to protest the draft Social Security law and general health insurance.

TV News:
CNN Turk

Domestic News

- A Turkish delegation will meet in Baghdad with Nechirvan Barzani, the prime minister of the KRG in northern Iraq.
- The government has reduced the number of students accepted into imam-hatip Islamic cleric-training high schools. In an effort to improve the quality of education, the number of students was reduced from 120,000 to 100,000.
- The pro-Kurdish DTP lawmaker Bengi Yildiz asked Justice Minister Mehmet Ali Sahin whether the phones of DTP deputies are being tapped.

International News

- Vice President Dick Cheney will come to Turkey during his Middle East tour which begins March 16. Cheney will meet with President Abdullah Gul, Prime Minister Erdogan, and the Military General Staff Chief Yasar Buyukanit. Items on his agenda include the fight against the PKK, Iraq and bilateral relations between Turkey and the US.
- President Abdullah Gul will travel to Dakar, Senegal on Wednesday to participate in the 11th session of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

WILSON